

Thomas F. Hoppin House
383 Benefit Street
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-166

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
66-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-166

THOMAS F. HOPPIN HOUSE

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Address: 383 Benefit Street, Providence, Providence County,
Rhode Island.
Plat 16, Lot 239

Present Owner: William C. Fisher Company, 383 Benefit Street,
Providence 3, Rhode Island.

Present Occupant: Owner and several business tenants.

Present Use: The first floor is used as a show-room and offices
by the owner, a firm of interior designers; the
upper floors are rented out as offices.

Brief Statement
of Significance: This is one of the largest and most elegant houses
built in Providence in the mid-nineteenth century,
and was at that time, a center of artistic and
social life in the city.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: On this spot in 1798 stood the Mansion House of John Inness Clark--a three-story wood house almost the duplicate of the Nightingale house now standing at 357 Benefit Street. In 1823 Lydia Clark, his widow sold to William Almy "lot of land with buildings thereon being the Mansion House of my late husband John I. Clark bounded W by Benefit Street; S by John Street; E and N on land of Williams Thayer." William Almy married Sarah Brown the daughter of Moses Brown. Their daughter Anna married William Jenkins, manufacturer. At this time Anna Jenkins was the "richest woman in America." In 1849 a fire razed this Mansion House, the only survivors being Moses 15, who never married, and Anna 17, who married Thomas Hoppin, artist. Deed book 47, Page 81, in Providence City Hall.

1854 Property taxed to William Jenkins Heirs.

1856 Property taxed to Thomas F. Hoppin and wife, although he did not live here until 1861.

1873 Thomas Hoppin died and in 1874 his widow married Henry Babbitt of Connecticut.

1876 Property taxed to Anna A. Babbitt wife of Henry

1920 In this year Alice Fox, granddaughter of and legatee of Anna Babbitt sold this property to the Hoeffler-Fisher Company. Deed book 596, page 188, in Providence City Hall.

1933 Property taxed to the William C. Fisher Company and is used for business purposes.

2. Date of erection: Variously dated c. 1851, c. 1853, or c. 1855.
3. Architects: Alpheus C. Morse, 1818-1893. He was born in Haverill, Massachusetts. Practiced in Providence from c. 1850 until the time of his death. He designed business buildings, private homes, Brown Buildings, (Sayles Hall, Laboratory) and was associate for plans for the Rhode Island Hospital. In the 1830's he worked as draftsman in the office of Alexander Parris of Boston. **In 1876 he became first president of Rhode Island Chapter of the A.I.A.** Obituary, Providence-Journal, November 27, 1893, states he stayed in Europe several years and traveled with Seth Cheney, American engraver. The same article states "Mr. Morse's first architectural work in Providence was the designing and superintending the erection of the residence of Thomas F. Hoppin at the corner of Benefit and John Streets. The house stands today as an example of the very best work in Italian Renaissance, a style in which Mr. Morse delighted to work."

A letter in the Rhode Island Historical Society, dated February 21, 1921 contains an inventory of Morse's work. The heading announces that it was copied from "a list, evidently compiled by A. C. Morse from his account books, but not including all of his works, and some of which have been added by A. L. Almy, formerly a draughtsman with Morse." List dates the Hoppin house, 1855. The account books can not be found.

Morse was in Europe in 1842. The Hoppin house shows the influence of Sir Charles Barry. During the period of Hoppin House, Morse formed partnership with G. G. and J. R. Hall. Their first important commission was the Merchant's Bank Building on Exchange Place. Besides the Hoppin House, Morse built William Binney House, (1859), 22 Prospect Street; William G. Angell House, 30 Benefit Street, (1869). (From Anita F. Glass, Early Victorian Domestic Architecture on College Hill).

4. **Notes** on alterations: Sleeping quarters for servants in the kitchen, and the stable wing have been remodeled. The main house has been altered very little, except that original oak paneling has been painted in all rooms except the front parlors and the stair hall.

5. Sources of information: John Hutchins Cady, The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island: The Book Shop, 1957), pp. 126, 140.
Anita F. Glass, Early Victorian Domestic Architecture on College Hill (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Art, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1960).
Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Rhode Island Architecture (Providence: Rhode Island Museum Press, 1939), p. 50
Providence (Providence, Rhode Island: The Merchants National Bank, 1918), pp. 60-62.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The following is from: Providence (Providence, Rhode Island: The Merchants National Bank, 1918), pp. 60-62:

Called the "House of 1,000 Candles" because of the lavish entertainment that went on here.

Built in 1853 for Thomas F. Hoppin - the site of the old John Innis Clark House that was built in 1791 (similar to the Nightingale House in design). George Washington was reportedly entertained here.

Description of Thomas F. Hoppin

Clothes fitted exquisitely, wore a tall beaver hat, monocle in his left eye, carried a cane and gloves with a greyhound at his side.

The original Clark House was destroyed by fire which broke out on the evening of November 20th, 1849; the house was then owned by Mrs. Jenkins (granddaughter of Moses Brown) and her family. Mrs. Jenkins perished with her youngest daughter. Her oldest daughter Ann Jenkins survived and married Thomas F. Hoppin, one of the artistic sons of Auton House (Westminster St.). He built the present Hoppin Villa and it became the center of artistic life in the community as well as a leading social center.

The bronze dog that once graced the front lawn of the home was designed by Mr. Hoppin and cast by Gorham's; (Supposedly the first bronze cast in the country). It represented the watch dog that, on the night of the Clark Mansion fire, broke his chain to warn the family.

In the niche above the carriage entrance is a figure of a young girl holding a pitcher. It is Flora, symbolic of the sister of Ann who lost her life in the fire - last seen at the window with a pitcher in her hand.

Exterior is plain (Italian Villa) almost forbidding.
Interior - planned for gracious living - designed for receptions, musicals, balls, small dinners, and banquets.
Drawing Room - rose touched with gold leaf - crystal chandeliers - later sold and taken to Hollywood.

Thomas Hoppin had studied under Paul Delaroche, he designed Four Evangelists in Trinity Church, N. Y. C. His brother Augustus illustrated Dr. Holmes' Autocrat at the Breakfast Table.

Later the Hoppin Villa was occupied by Gov. Wetmore. For a while it was used by the Episcopal Sisterhood, when the handsome drawing room became a silent chapel.

Villa was unoccupied in 1877 but opened by Gen. Burnside who furnished it for the occasion of a visit of President and Mrs. Hayes for a reception with lanterns in the back garden.

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey
for the Providence Preservation Society
July 1961.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is one of the largest mid-nineteenth century houses in Providence, 3 stories high of brick, with elegant interiors. Professor William Jordy, Brown University, considers this the most distinguished house, architecturally, in Providence.
2. Condition of fabric: Except for some of the brownstone trim which is spalling, the house appears to be in fairly good condition.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The house is an H-shaped block, about 50' x 66', 3 stories high, facing south toward John Street and west toward Benefit Street. A 1-1/2 story kitchen wing, about 30' x 30', is connected to the rear (northeast) of the house. The kitchen wing is connected by an archway to a stable or carriage house to the northeast of the kitchen.
2. Foundations: Regular coursed, dressed, tooled brownstone.
3. Wall construction: Red brick laid in common bond. Rusticated brownstone quoins on the first story only; the line of the quoining is continued by flat brick pilasters at the corner through the second and third stories. First and second stories divided by a flat brownstone belt course.

4. Porches: Brownstone entrance porch, about 12' x 12', one-story high, with Doric arcade. The porch is on the south side of the house with five steps on the west side leading toward Benefit Street, and four steps on the east side leading toward a courtyard. The floor of the porch is laid with brown and white paving stones, 12" square. A side entrance porch from the courtyard on east is a one-story, three-bay arcade set in the depressed part of the H-shaped block of the house. The arcade is made of brick with brownstone trim, and is surmounted by a balustrade. At the second floor level above the side arcade is a proportionately small niche **with** a statue of a full length female figure.
5. Chimneys: Four brick chimneys, barely visible from the ground.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Double, two leaf entrance doors on south with semi-circular top light, glass outside doors, and paneled wood inside doors. East side entrance has single leaf door in the north bay of the arcade.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Double hung wood windows, 6 over 6 light on first and second floors, 3 over 3 light on the third floor. Molded brownstone window frames; window cornices on first and second floors. Cornices on scrolled brackets on first floor. The three recessed center windows on the first floor on the west side with carved, semi-circular, brownstone lunettes repeat the arcade motif on the east side. There are no shutters, but the windows on all three floors are fitted with shutter hardware.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape: Low hip roof, barely visible from the ground.
 - b. Cornice: Bracketed wood (possibly partly metal) Cornice with cyma recta crown mold.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: The house is laid out about a central hallway running north-south. The south end of the hall is a large vestibule for the main, south entrance. The half of the house west of the hall is divided into three large

rooms; the east half into a large room at the front, a stair hall and east entrance hall at the center, and a smaller room and corridor leading to the kitchen wing at the rear. The second floor has eight rooms in a similar arrangement around a central hall and the stair hall. Some of the second floor rooms have been subdivided for office use. The third floor arrangement is similar to the second.

2. Stairways: Heavy Eastlavian stairway, U-shaped with landings, from first to third floor, open well, closed paneled outside string, ramped railing, paneled wood soffits stained a dark oak color. The stair hall is separated from the central hall by a triple arcade corresponding to the similar arcades on the exterior on the east and west sides and to the similar treatment on the opposing inside wall of the west center room.
3. Flooring: Vestibule floor is black and white marble tile. Other floors are wide pine boards now covered with wall to wall carpeting on the first floor and later asphalt tile on the upper floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Elaborate plaster or wood paneling on the first floor. The two front rooms at the southeast and southwest corners of the house have oak paneled walls, plaster ceilings laid off in panels, and cornices with Doric friezes with triglyphs and elaborate detail. The ceiling in the southwest room is grained to look like wood. The plaster ceiling in the hall has one large recessed panel, heavily molded, with quarter rounds taken out of the corners. The two other principal rooms on the first floor have plaster walls and ceilings with elaborate trim. The upper floors have plaster walls and ceilings with simpler trim.
5. Doors and doorways: The first floor has heavy, molded oak doors, some sliding, some six panel doors. Many doors apparently removed. Upper floors have six panel wood doors. Windows are recessed in the masonry walls with paneled reveals.
6. Trim: The southwest and southeast front rooms have recessed oak paneled wainscoting, and one-story oak projecting mantel pieces. The oak mantel in the southwest room is deeply carved, with twisted columns and a great lion mask, with pink marble facing and a black marble hearth.

The walls in the middle room on the west side of the house are paneled with raised moldings with roccoco leaf detail at the tops and bottoms and have over-door

carvings, chair rail and paneled wainscots. The ceiling has a center medallion from which a crystal chandelier is hung, and a molded plaster cornice with egg and dart, and guilloche bands of ornament. A mirror of the mantel is part of the room decoration; richly carved white marble mantel and white marble hearth. The ceiling in the northwest room on the first floor is marked off in a rectangular paneled pattern with plaster moldings and has molded medallions.

Upper floors have much simpler trim with molded, mitered architraves on doors and windows.

7. Hardware: First floor and part of second floor have silver plated hardware; other places, brass; doors on butt hinges.
8. Lighting: Electric, not original.
9. Heating: Central heating with radiators.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south on a large northeast corner lot in a residential section.
2. Enclosures: West side and part of south side of the lot are enclosed by a brownstone balustrade with cast iron balusters. There are iron gates at the sidewalk entrance at the west side and the driveway entrance on the south side.
3. Outbuildings: There is an attached stable, or carriage house, **at the northeast side of the house.**
4. Walks, driveways: Asphalt paved driveway along the east side of the house leads past the east entrance to the carriage house. Walks from the south entrance to the driveway and to the street are large flagstones. Brick sidewalks in herringbone pattern along south and west sides of the lot.
5. Landscaping: The original property extended farther to the north and east in gardens. The present landscaping is informal with lawn and shrubs in poor condition.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
and Antoinette F. Downing
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